Connecting Lives



Welcome to Connecting Lives!

This issue marks a milestone. In 2002, during Malawi's worst famine on record, a small group from Living Waters, a Malawian church, asked a simple question: what could we do to tackle hunger that would **really last?** How could we turn despondent dependency into **hopeful action?**

This year, two of the people who built Eagles from those first days have moved on – Cuthbert and Esneli (see p4). So we're looking back at where it all began, celebrating their contribution and reflecting on Eagles' impact.

The work goes on and keeps reflecting those early values.

Beyond Aid: communities transform lives

Last year Eagles supported 1,477,192 people. The core work Malawi Support funds reached 375,445 people of all faiths and none.

Communities healed relationships, strengthened safety, protected their environment and improved standard of living, health and hygiene and education. Most of all, they stopped waiting for outside help and used their own resources to solve problems.

444 local churches and communities
TRANSFORMING LIVES

13,108 vulnerable adults and children
GAINING CONFIDENCE AND INFLUENCE

476 people saving money – in 34 self-help groups
BREAKING DEPENDENCY

82 church leaders trained in Eagles' approach – 471 since 2016
EXTENDING THE WORK ACROSS MALAWI

46 countries reached by Eagles' online course
EQUIPPING NGO AND CHURCH LEADERS WORLDWIDE

In the past, we were just doing our own thing. But now we work together as church and community.
(Kamkwenu farmers, central Malawi)

From Handouts to Hope

In 2002, Malawi faced its worst famine on record. 85% of people depended on what they could grow, and life expectancy was just 38 years.

Living Waters, with more than 400 churches across Malawi, wanted to help. The church's founder and leader, Stanley Ndovie, set up Eagles – its name conveying that an eagle rises on storm winds.

Eagles began handing out maize. But handouts are expensive and short-term. Some church members shared their concerns and the leadership asked them to find out what they should do instead.

A steering group with relevant expertise came together to explore: what could a church do that no one else could – and that would last?

They began by learning from others. Tearfund offered two places on a training course for partners in that region. Cuthbert (a young church leader) and Cathy (a development adviser) participated. They visited an NGO food distribution in Chikwawa to see how the professionals did it. There Cuthbert asked a widow in the queue what she would do next. Her answer stayed with him:

> **I'll just go home and wait until the food handout comes next month.**



Eagles determined not to do food handouts that increase dependency.

Breaking dependency

The two came back deeply troubled – determined to find a better way. That conversation changed everything. The group began to dream of change that came from within, not from outside. Every congregation had local leaders, local trust and people who weren't going anywhere. Couldn't they help their neighbours find their own solutions?

The people who made it possible

Eagles registered in September 2002. Steering group members gave their time and resources voluntarily. And Eagles took on its small staff team.



Cuthbert (left) and Victor in 2003, a few months after Eagles began.

Victor – now Eagles' Director – became its first employee that December, bravely stepping out when Eagles only had funds to pay him for three months. Cuthbert joined the staff two months later. Then Jimmy – now CCM Coordinator – joined as driver. And Esneli as Accounts and Administration Assistant (later Finance and Administration Manager). They became the core staff driving the work from then right up to 2026.

Starting with what you have

Between late 2002 and early 2003, the team brought together more than 150 church leaders from every region. The leaders were surprised to find how much the Bible says about poverty and justice – and beginning with what you have.

In the midst of hunger in their own families, they had to learn to care for their communities too. They grappled with the key question: how could their churches respond without any money from outside? Each went home with their own plan. As Victor said:

> **The church is permanently there. We discovered that we, the people, are the resources, and we have the solutions.**

Pioneering a better way

As church leaders began to put their learning into practice and shared the impact, others realised they could do more. And so the momentum grew. Eagles drew in specialists, such as in HIV/AIDS, to help people understand how to tackle root causes of hunger.

And Eagles continued to develop and pioneer the combined use of Bible reflection, participatory activities and development expertise.

From Chikwawa to the World

At the same time as training the churches nationally, Eagles chose to test its ideas in one of the hardest places it could find. Everyone said you could not do participatory development in the midst of famine. But Eagles wanted to try a different way – to enable people to analyse and tackle the root causes of hunger themselves – with the local church alongside supporting.

Eagles began this pilot in three villages in Mthumba, Chikwawa district – the worst-affected region and in communities that no NGO was reaching. In February 2003, 97% of people in Mthumba had no food left. Up to 78% of young children were malnourished – many of them severely so.

Going the extra mile

It took sacrifice and dedication to make an impact in such a difficult context. Victor and Cuthbert would leave Blantyre very early each morning, catch the minibus down for 1.5 hours to Chikwawa, then get on the back of a bike to bump across the terrain to these villages. They would reverse that at the end of the day, arriving back exhausted, often after 10pm. One night thieves came to Cuthbert's house. They took everything except the clothes he slept in. He was so exhausted that he never even woke up!

Values in action

Eagles helped with food for a few months in return for work. They worked hand in hand with government district officials and other agencies.

But the villages chose the work they could do to tackle the causes of hunger. Two villages set up community gardens to multiply seed so every family could have something to plant. They grew drought-resistant cassava and sweet potatoes – and so successfully that truckloads of people arrived from other places to learn from them. All because it was theirs – their idea, their work. The other village planted a tree nursery. It seemed an odd choice at the time. But a year later those trees protected fields and homes from floods – and even saved a life.

From famine to flourishing

The results were astounding. And everyone benefitted, whatever their church or faith. By the end of May, only 8% of the children were still moderately malnourished. Theft had gone down to 0%. Village committees organised everything themselves and kept their own records.

Funders who had overlooked this unknown NGO earlier now asked to partner with them – and the work grew to reach 11,000 people in three years.

> Now it is easy to look after my son because my family has food. We have hope ...
> (Sabuneti, Chikwawa, 2003)



Communities analyse root causes of issues and find solutions, with Cuthbert.

Sustaining change

When the food stopped, the work carried on. The villages set up childcare centres for the under-fives. They each made their own community plan.

Years on they have planted trees, carried out irrigation, set up HIV support groups and savings groups. One chief said:
"Now as village headman, I can be at peace. If it weren't for this support, we would have died."

What grew from the early days

Those lessons became Church and Community Mobilisation (CCM): helping local people come together to prioritise issues and solve them together, using their own resources. Tearfund drew on Eagles' experience as it helped to take CCM worldwide.

Today Eagles works from 8 offices across 24 districts and in more than 500 communities.

Same mission, 20+ years on

"To mobilise and empower local churches and communities to take responsibility for their own development, collaborate with others, and work together to achieve lasting and holistic change."

The words have barely changed since Eagles articulated its mission in 2003 – and neither have the values behind them.



Thank you, Cuthbert and Esneli

Cuthbert looks back

Cuthbert was a young pastor on the steering group that started Eagles in 2002, and its secretary. He joined the staff in 2003 and became one of Eagles' lead CCM trainers.

"What stands out for me is how God guided our steps. I was the least experienced person on the steering group, but we were all treated the same. When I offered my thoughts, they were taken seriously. That made me feel safe and welcome, and it gave me confidence. At every meeting we prayed for guidance – and then went for it. Whatever we agreed, people did. That's why we moved so fast.

Once, pastors from Kakoma asked us to train them. I told them our project didn't reach that far and we had no funds. They said, 'We don't need food. We have our own notebooks. All we need is for you to teach us.' After just one day of training, they bought treadle pumps, started irrigating and bought school uniforms for orphans.

After training church leaders in Mchinji district, one church went out and reached over 3,000 people – without any budget, without any funding from Eagles, just the passion they got from the training. They set up clubs, taught people to make fertiliser, and those people trained others."

> [CCM] spread just like bush fire. That's transformation – it's very effective and very sustainable.

Esneli recalls the early days



Esneli joined Eagles in 2003 as Accounts and Administration Assistant, and went on to become Finance and Administration Manager.

"I went to the office expecting that, as Accounts and Administration Assistant, I would be reporting to some senior person. But that was not the case. I asked to whom I should report and the answer came back: 'We do not know. This is why we hired you.' From that time, I had to figure out what to do – and with the help of a sister agency I was able to do reports on my own.

My best memory is of distributing relief items in the field. I felt so happy to be part of the team, lending a helping hand. I'm so proud of Eagles' passion to work with rural communities and churches."



"I'm most proud that I was able to train others – staff, and hundreds of community facilitators who are now transforming their own communities.

What I take forward from Eagles is:

> Multiply yourself. Be generous with what you know. It's not about who does it, but how we do it. Communities have resources, knowledge and wisdom. They deserve to be respected – and truly loved.

The work goes on

Eagles has always known that people move on. Growing the next generation of CCM leaders is one of Malawi Support's core areas of partnership.

Eagles' finances remain in experienced hands, with Steve managing the finance work.

Jimmy, Cuthbert's fellow CCM trainer and CCM Coordinator for the Southern and Eastern regions, now manages Eagles' CCM work.

Eagles plans to:

- train at least 30 experienced pastors as CCM facilitators – one for every district in Malawi
- train 18 staff, so CCM runs through all its projects
- place a CCM facilitator in every Eagles office
- keep training Bible School students annually

And Cuthbert hasn't gone far. As a Living Waters pastor, he still volunteers with Eagles at weekends and mentors the facilitators he trained.

Could you help train the next generation?

A gift towards CCM training will help Eagles equip facilitators in every district.

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